



# Mirror of Violence: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Behaviour Through the Minds of Alex and Baby

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**Abstract**— Grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, this article particularly focuses on analysing the central characters, Alex and Baby, from Stanley Kubrick's classic film 'A Clockwork Orange' (1972) and the 1985 Malayalam movie 'Irakal' respectively. These two films are set in two completely different cultural and familial backgrounds. While Baby comes from an isolated village in Kerala, from a wealthy family, Alex is presented as a character who lives with his parents in a block of flats in a dystopian England. The study seeks to elucidate the fundamental assertion that human behaviour, far from being a product of innate predispositions alone, is profoundly malleable and subject to the pervasive influence of external forces. It aims to uncover the universal principles governing human behaviour, which go beyond geographic boundaries, by looking at behavioural in Western and Eastern cultural contexts using the medium of film. Films act as texts that can be studied and read to learn about social conventions, cultural trends, and shared concerns. Whether on purpose or accidentally, filmmakers incorporate such social commentaries into their works and thereby films act as an effective tool for learning about and comprehending the people and the world around us. Therefore, we can learn more about human behaviour, varied emotions, and personality traits by analysing film characters, which enables us to explore more philosophical sides of the human mind.



**Keywords**— aggressive behaviour, dysfunctional family, social cognitive theory, social conditioning, violence.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Albert Bandura, a Canadian-American psychologist, in one of his most celebrated works *Social Learning Theory*, gives a 'unified theoretical framework for analyzing human thought and behavior' (Bandura vi). Social learning theory points out the undeniable roles that vicarious, symbolic, and self-regulatory processes play in psychological functioning. Bandura emphasises that human thought, affect, and behaviour can be remarkably influenced by observation, as well as by direct experience. Secondly, the distinct capacity of human beings to use symbols leads them to represent actions and to analyse their conscious experience. This symbolic function extended the range of techniques for analysing their thought and the mechanisms

by which these thoughts regulate action. The third distinguishing feature of social learning theory is the fundamental role it assigns to the self-regulatory processes. According to the self-regulatory process, people are not mere reactors to external influences. Rather, they consciously select, classify, and convert the stimuli that impinge upon them.

The 1985 film *Irakal*, which translates to "Victims," written and directed by the phenomenal maestro K. G. George is a Malayalam psychological thriller. The plot revolves around a web of criminal activity and a dysfunctional family. Baby's portrayal in the film offers a rich tapestry of emotions, conflicts, and psychological nuances. He carries a red wire loop with him right from the

beginning of the film, which he uses to kill those he suspects as his enemies. The multifaceted behavioural patterns exhibited by him throughout this tumultuous narrative underscore the profound influence exerted by cultural and societal norms on individual actions and decisions.

On the other hand, it is worth noting the enduring impact of Stanley Kubrick's influential movie, *A Clockwork Orange*, which debuted in 1971, over five decades ago, adapted from Anthony Burgess's novel of the same name. Malcolm McDowell's depiction of Alex DeLarge as a character exuding extreme violence is a key focal point for delving into complex questions. As the story unfolds, Alex's hedonistic desires, the consequences of his behaviour, and the societal efforts to control his unpredictable nature all come together to paint a grim picture of a world filled with corruption and moral decline.

Considering these characters, it becomes clearer that where novel forms of behaviour can be conveyed effectively only by social cues, modelling is an indispensable aspect of learning. When presented with a variety of models, observers seldom model their behaviour solely after one particular source, nor do they take on all the characteristics of even their favourite models. Instead, observers create new amalgams that are distinct from the constituent parts by merging elements of multiple models. In a thorough analysis of the effects of external factors on the behaviour of the characters in question, a deep exploration of the complicated interplay between individual actions and external influences will illuminate a compelling argument for the considerable impact of external stimuli on behavioural patterns. Therefore, contrary to popular assumption, we can say that modelling can lead to the emergence of novel patterns.

From the Social learning perspective, psychological functioning is a continuous reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants. The term reciprocal is used in the sense of mutual action between events rather than in the narrower meaning of similar or opposite counterreactions (Bandura, 1977, p.199).

In addition, firsthand experience encouraged the creation of observational paradigms for research on the influence of socially mediated experience. Because of our remarkable ability to employ symbols, humans can plan, create, envision, analyse their conscious experiences, connect with others at any distance, in time or space, and take action with foresight. The field of methods for studying thinking and the processes by which thought controls behaviour was broadened by the renewed emphasis on symbolic functions. One of the characteristics that sets

social learning theory apart is the importance it places on self-regulation mechanisms. People are more than just passive recipients of outside forces. They choose, arrange, and modify the stimuli that affect them. They have some control over their behaviour through self-created incentives and penalties.

It is evident that the characters Alex and Baby each embody distinct qualities and motivations in their approach to violence and society. Both of them stand out from other commonly found characters as they offer a comprehensive dive into their familial and societal backgrounds. Their behaviours, although both centred around the act of killing, stem from very different origins and avenues of expression. The film *Irakal* portrays Baby's character as a result of a troubled upbringing and a dysfunctional family setting. This has significantly influenced his inclination towards violence and conduct. The absence of consequences for his violent behaviour only strengthens and continues to fuel his tendency towards violence. On the contrary, Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* offers a distinct view on criminal behaviour. His behaviour is depicted as a reaction to the oppressive and dehumanising environment he lives in. Alex's violent actions are portrayed as a rebellious response to the oppressive and dictatorial aspects of his surroundings when viewed through a critical societal perspective.

## II. BABY: A 'VICTIM' OF SOCIAL CONDITIONING

In the Malayalam psychological thriller *Irakal* (The Victims), viewers come across the mysterious and complex character of Baby, expertly portrayed by the talented actor Ganesh Kumar. Using Bandura's social cognitive theory to examine Baby's character enables a thorough analysis of how his actions, individual characteristics, and surroundings all influence his development throughout the story. By examining Baby's behaviours, reasons, and reactions we can discover the hidden forces influencing his choices and decipher the complexities of his character development. K G George has masterfully added different layers to each character surrounding Baby.

Violence was there in the films of K G George as an undercurrent. It is not an explicit portrayal of violence but a subtle way of expression. Most of his characters are from the social situation where they face denial of justice. The situation entrapped them and has made them arrogant inside and violent outside (Smitha & Balasubramaniam, 2021).

The family environment within Baby's household is characterised by toxicity and oppression, primarily attributable to the authoritarian demeanour of his father, the submissive disposition of his mother, and the indifferent attitudes of the siblings. These factors collectively contribute to Baby's psychological distress. Furthermore, the absence of a nurturing and supportive atmosphere exacerbates his mental health issues. The film's socio-economic setting, encompassing the family's prosperity and societal expectations, exerts a formative influence on Baby's perceptions and conduct.

Mathews, Baby's father, a rubber mogul, uses bribery to get around the underworld and amasses his fortune through criminal businesses, including marijuana and bootlegging. The role played by Thilakan is portrayed as a highly astute and commanding figure, carefully employing his intelligence and perceptiveness to assert control. His outlook is imbued with entrenched traditional patriarchal values, reflecting his firm adherence to established principles of male authority and dominance. He consistently exhibits minimal emotional warmth or vulnerability, often engaging in the suppression of softer emotions to uphold control and authority. His main driving force is centred around maintaining the social standing and financial prosperity of his family, sometimes prioritising these goals over the personal welfare of individual family members.

Baby experienced cognitive dissonance, confusion, and profound despair due to the constant pressure from his father's expectations and lack of emotional support from his mother. His emotional suffering increased as he tried to balance his dreams with his family's needs, resulting in public outbursts of aggression and unpredictability. Caught in a tangled web of internal conflicts and negative thought patterns, he struggles with the lasting impact of his authoritarian father's dominant presence and his passive mother's inability to provide a strong counterbalance. These influences have contributed to the complex mesh of emotions and beliefs he recurrently grapples with. Not only Baby but all four children of Mathews are dealing with their own varied set of challenges.

In the case of social behaviour, children within the same family may develop dissimilar personality characteristics by drawing upon different parental and sibling attributes. Successive modelling, in which observers later serve as sources of behaviour for new members, would most likely produce a gradual imitative evolution of new patterns bearing little resemblance to those exhibited by the original models. In homogeneous

cultures, where all models display similar styles of behavior, behavior may undergo little or no change throughout a series of successive models. It is diversity in modelling that fosters behavioural innovation (Bandura, 1977, p. 48).

The family's interests are forcefully enforced by his eldest son, Koshy, who actively participates in criminal activities. He is as ambitious and short-tempered as his father, willing to take risks for mere profit. The second son, Sunny, struggles to escape his father's control but lacks the motivation to do it since he is stuck in a vicious cycle of hatred and dependency. He is entrapped in alcoholism but wants to move to the city with his wife to start a business. Comparatively, he is the only character who stands for justice and questions the wrongdoings happening within his family. The only daughter, Annie, is caught in a tumultuous marriage with Andrews and often returns to her home after fights. Unknown to her father and brothers, who hold Andrews responsible for their marital woes, Annie, enjoys a carefree life. Disobeying her marriage to Andrews, she uses her family strife as a pretext for her extramarital affair with Mathews' goon, Unnunni.

Lastly, there's Baby, the youngest of the siblings. But he is more of a criminal. He has a violent streak and murderous thoughts, which are made worse by drug abuse and social disengagement. Baby goes from abusing a classmate to killing Annie's lover, Unnunni, and then, driven by jealousy, kills his lover Nirmala's fiancé, Balan. Baby tries to kill his companion Raghavan as his mental state worsens, but he is caught, identified, and denounced by the police. In a heartbreaking conclusion that highlights the family's blindness to Baby's mental decline, Baby shoots Koshy in the final confrontation before being slain by his father, Mathews. The story skilfully depicts the depravity, denial, and eventual destruction of a family engulfed in crime and discord among its members.

The differential consequences and social inducements associated with various forms of conduct most likely account for the temporal variations between exemplification and subsequent adoptions. (Bandura, 1977) The divergent outcomes and societal stimuli linked to different behavioural patterns play a crucial role in the fluctuations witnessed in the timelines regarding the demonstration of certain behaviours and their subsequent embracement by individuals. It is widely observed that the prompt acceptance of positive and socially beneficial innovations often elevates the status of the individuals undertaking such actions. Conversely, engaging in activities that contravene legal statutes or societal norms exposes individuals to the looming threat of repercussions or penalties.

Vicarious punishment has been shown to have similar inhibitory effects on transgressive behaviour. People who have seen models punished for violating prohibitions are less inclined to transgress themselves than if modelled violations were either rewarded or simply ignored. In the specific case study of Baby, his unwavering certainty in his father's financial resources acting as a shield against any potential consequences serves as a pivotal factor driving his continued engagement in criminal activities. This apparent sense of invincibility emanating from the perceived shelter of familial wealth seems to embolden Baby in persisting with his delinquent behaviour, as he harbours the belief that any legal or societal repercussions are inconsequential in light of his familial safety net. This unique narrative underscores the intricate relationship between individual psychosocial factors and external influences in shaping behaviour patterns and decision-making processes.

The notion of status enhancement stemming from the early adoption of virtuous or socially commendable practices underscores the inherent societal preference for positive role models and contributors. Those individuals who proactively embrace novel and uplifting behaviours tend to be lauded and esteemed within their respective communities, thereby amplifying their social standing and influence. On the flip side, individuals who flout established norms or laws place themselves at risk of censure, ostracism, or legal consequences, thus highlighting the dualistic nature of the societal response to divergent forms of conduct.

The tragic tale of Baby serves as a moving reminder of the power play within the complex web of human relationships, shedding light on the profound impact of societal expectations and cultural influences on individual destinies. The poignant unravelling of events underscores the enduring relevance of psychological theories in understanding and interpreting the complex nuances of human behaviour, offering insight into the complex interplay between personal agency and external forces in shaping the route of one's life. Baby himself is a victim of the social conditioning. Echoing the tenets of the social cognitive theory, Baby's trajectory exemplifies the never-ending conflict between personal experiences, environmental factors, and learned behaviours, shaping his tumultuous path towards an irreversible fate.

### III. THE 'CLOCKWORKS' OF SOCIETY ON ALEX

*A Clockwork Orange*, a modern-day dystopian work of art remains popular worldwide as it explores the concept of "ultra-violence" from the viewpoint of a gang of British troublemaking teenagers. Kubrick's film delves into the complex and occasionally unsettling interactions of

societal violence, bringing to attention themes that remain significant in ongoing conversations. This movie compels viewers to consider the root causes and circumstances that result in violent actions by showcasing the beginnings and influences of such behaviour in society.

In a future UK setting, Alex DeLarge is the vicious leader of a gang named the "Droogs", alongside Georgie, Dim, and Pete as fellow members. The narrative unfolds with a concerning sequence of occurrences driven by a combination of excessive violence fuelled by intoxication. The group perpetrates heinous acts such as assaulting a vagrant on the streets and engaging in a violent altercation with a rival gang, all under the guidance of Alex's malevolent leadership. According to Bandura, the individuals that someone interacts with frequently, by choice or obligation, determine the behaviours that will be consistently witnessed and therefore learned most effectively. Members of violent gangs and individuals in peaceful groups have very different chances to learn aggressive behaviour (Bandura, 1977).

Peer influence is a significant factor in Alex's behavioural patterns, as his gang of friends exert pressure on him to engage in criminal activities. The vigour within his social group, comprised of individuals like Dim, Georgie, and Pete, create a strong sense of camaraderie based on shared deviant behaviours. This sense of belonging within the group reinforces Alex's involvement in acts of violence and rebellion, as he seeks validation and acceptance from his peers. Observational learning also plays a crucial role in shaping Alex's behaviour, as he closely observes the actions and attitudes of his friends within the gang. Through the process of modelling, Alex not only learns new ways of behaving but also internalises the norms and values of his social group. The gang's glorification of violence and disregard for societal rules become ingrained in Alex's mindset through repeated exposure to their behaviours, leading him to adopt similar attitudes and actions.

Moreover, the gang's social approval additionally motivates Alex to continue his violent and antisocial behaviour by rewarding him for being aggressive and disregarding rules. The support and approval he receives from his friends drive him to continue his negative behaviour, as he associates these actions with being included and valued by his peers. This feedback pattern motivates Alex to keep engaging in unlawful actions, as he aims to maintain his reputation and status among his friends. Hence, Alex's actions in *A Clockwork Orange* are significantly influenced by the relationships he has with his companions. The violent and antisocial tendencies of the individual can be understood through peers, observational



learning, and social reinforcement with the help of social cognitive theory. By examining how Alex's friends interact and impact his social circle, we gain valuable insights into the complex influences on his behaviour and personality in the movie. Albert Bandura's theory of social cognition presents the idea of reciprocal determinism, which is crucial in comprehending and assessing the complexities of Alex's development and transformations throughout his journey. Crucial to understanding this is the continuous interplay between personal factors, behaviour, and the environment, which mutually impact and are impacted by one another in a dynamic exchange.

Alex's family environment is defined by parents who are uninvolved and ineffective, and it does not have any good role models. The movie portrays detachment by examining the complexity in Alex's family, specifically highlighting his strained relationships with his parents. His parents appear largely disinterested and ineffective in their attempts to guide or manage him. The lack of supervision and moral guidance enables Alex to openly cultivate and follow through with his violent tendencies. Alex's father is portrayed as distant and passive, often overshadowed by his wife's more assertive manner. This situation does not provide Alex with a stable role model of a father to emulate. Despite being more assertive, Alex's mother fails to greatly influence him. Alex's lack of respect for authority figures and tendency towards antisocial behaviour is made worse by the ineffectiveness of consequences.

Initially, in the narrative of Alex's life, we witness how his environment and personal traits act as reciprocal reinforcing factors that contribute to his engagement in violent behaviours. The environment he is immersed in, characterised by violence, delinquency, and neglect, coupled with his own predispositions and psychological makeup, creates a toxic cycle where his actions and the environment feed into each other, strengthening the manifestation of his violent tendencies. However, as Alex undergoes treatment and experiences a shift in his surroundings, the role of the environment in influencing his behaviour takes on a different form. While external factors still wield a significant impact, the treatment exposes a fundamental disruption in the balance of reciprocal determinism. Alex, conditioned to act in certain ways through a process of reinforcement and punishment, finds himself struggling to exercise free will in choosing his actions.

Alex's battle with his automatic responses and outside influences shows a decrease in his capacity to make ethical choices. His story's main conflict stems from the clash between societal constraints and personal liberty, showcasing his battle to assert independence and uphold

ethical values. The interplay of these factors highlights an important idea in social learning theory, stressing the intricate connection among personal decisions, environment, and actions. When we take reciprocal determinism into account, we understand the intricate interplay of factors that have shaped Alex's journey - from being encouraged to behave aggressively at first to facing difficulties in asserting independence post-therapy of Ludovico Technique. As we delve deeper into his story, we are prompted to consider bigger questions about individual choice, the limitations imposed by the environment, and the ethical implications of societal systems influencing personal decisions. Thus, the case of Alex illustrates the multi-layered idea of reciprocal determinism, emphasizing the significance of comprehending how personal, behavioural, and environmental elements interact to influence human behaviour and experiences.

Believing in one's capability to achieve success in certain scenarios is an important part of social cognitive theory. Alex's interactions with his family do not help to enhance a sense of moral or social capability. His self-assurance stems from his ability to dominate and control others through aggression and fear, rather than any other source. The permissiveness of his parents inadvertently reinforces this belief, as they neither challenge nor correct his behaviour in meaningful ways. The lack of a supportive and morally instructive family environment deprives Alex of opportunities to develop positive self-regulatory mechanisms. Without guidance, he fails to internalise societal norms and values, relying instead on his immediate social group—the gang—for validation and reinforcement of his behaviour.

Bandura (1977) emphasises the role of the environment in shaping behaviour through reciprocal determinism—the interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences. This neglectful and permissive atmosphere in Alex's home greatly influences his behaviours. Lack of proper parental supervision and a lenient environment leads to the formation of behaviours that promote delinquency. The lack of structure and boundaries in Alex's permissive and neglectful family environment hinders healthy psychological development. Alex's actions are not solely determined by his own decisions, but are also influenced by the unsuitable upbringing in his family. The movie implies that Alex's delinquent actions are partly due to the absence of support and proper role modelling in his family environment.

The movie delves into the idea of free will and the ethical implications of behavioural conditioning as one of its main themes. By using the contentious Ludovico

Technique to treat Alex's violent tendencies, Kubrick prompts deep ethical questions about the role of choice and agency in influencing human behaviour. The juxtaposition of individual autonomy against the constraints of external control serves as a powerful allegory for the tensions between personal freedom and societal order. However, this intervention strips Alex of his free will, reducing his capacity for moral agency and self-regulation. This raises ethical questions about the manipulation of behaviour and the role of autonomy in personal development.

Moreover, *A Clockwork Orange* forces the audience to confront the disturbing truth that violence is not only a result of individual problems but is closely connected to societal frameworks and cultural standards. Kubrick illustrates the influence and continuity of violence by setting the story in a dystopian city with decay and disillusionment, emphasising systemic injustices and societal pressures. Today, the lasting importance of this film remains substantial as we confront ongoing issues of violence, crime, and social disturbance. The insightful study of human behaviour, ethics, and societal intricacies in the movie strikes a chord with viewers of all ages, causing us to contemplate the lasting impact of Kubrick's revolutionary examination of the more sinister elements of humanity. The significance of *A Clockwork Orange* is found not just in its distinct style and intricate plot, but also in its capacity to encourage self-reflection and spark discussions on the ongoing issues of violence and social deterioration. Half a century later, Kubrick's extraordinary movie remains a timeless examination of human behaviour amidst ethical challenges and social upheaval.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

##### From a Victim to a Victimiser

Albert Bandura's idea of social learning, also known as observational learning, was groundbreaking in the field of psychology. Bandura challenged Skinner's behaviourist views by arguing that learning is not limited to personal actions but can also occur through observation and imitation by both humans and animals. By watching role models, individuals can acquire new skills and behaviours by seeing their actions, attitudes, and outcomes, rather than having to test them firsthand. Watching and learning from others can greatly impact the development of social behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. His study on social learning has greatly influenced areas like education, psychology, and sociology. Understanding how people learn in a social setting can help educators improve teaching methods, therapists create better interventions, and society encourages positive behaviours.

Bandura's theory emphasises the intricate process of human learning and the significant impact of social factors on behaviour development. In the well-known studies on observational learning, such as the Bobo Doll experiment, inhospitable behaviour involved both harsh language and physical aggression, like hitting and punching. Researchers found that those who had watched the model either received positive reinforcement or no consequences for attacking the doll were more likely to show aggressive behaviour toward the doll (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003).

The interaction of individual choices with external factors such as cultural norms, societal expectations, and power play greatly shapes human behaviour. Baby from *Irakal* and Alex from *A Clockwork Orange*, both of these characters exemplify how societal pressures and evolving dominance influence personal identity and behaviour. This assessment highlights the impact of external factors on personal outcomes and the importance of personal efforts in addressing them. By examining the experiences of Alex and Baby, we can identify shared themes and influences that go beyond borders and limits. This method of comparison helps us understand how human experiences are connected and the common difficulties individuals encounter, regardless of their cultural or societal origins. Through acknowledging these shared experiences, we can cultivate a deeper comprehension and compassion towards others, recognizing the common factors that influence our identities and interactions with the world.

In *Irakal*, the cultural and societal expectations have a significant influence on Baby's life. The movie depicts him as a tragic character, whose fate is mostly influenced by the social context he is born into. The significant impact of cultural norms on Baby's actions implies that he is influenced more by his socialisation than by his own free will. His behaviour is a clear reaction to the demands and scrutiny from his family and community, emphasising the significant impact of external factors on his life. On the other hand, *A Clockwork Orange* depicts Alex as a character whose actions are shaped not just by external influences but also by his own choices within the societal frameworks he belongs to. Although cultural norms and societal expectations influence his behaviour, Alex takes an active role in interacting with these influences, especially through leading a gang. The movie delves into Alex's interactions with his social circle, showing how his actions are influenced by and also impact the world he inhabits. Alex, in contrast to Baby, is not just impacted by his surroundings but also plays a role in the power that shape his life.

The story of the Baby is one marked by victimisation, as his ability to make choices is diminished by powerful cultural and social forces. The movie portrays him as a passive individual whose future is determined by the surroundings he grows up in. This representation highlights how his socialisation shapes his actions and ultimate downfall, showing that they are a direct outcome of the cultural norms and expectations that control his existence. Meanwhile, Alex is depicted as both a victim and an offender, conversely. Although he is impacted by the societal structures and power undercurrents present, he also demonstrates a notable level of agency, especially in his position as the head of his gang. However, this agency is conditional, as evidenced by the eventual betrayal by his friends, who turn against him once he loses his position of power. This shift in group dynamics highlights the fragility of peer influence and the conditional nature of loyalty, underscoring the importance of social status and control in Alex's behaviour.

The analysis of Baby's character focuses on the power dynamics within the family and community that shape his destiny. These dynamics, while influential, are portrayed as external forces that Baby is unable to navigate or manipulate. His story illustrates the overwhelming power of cultural norms in determining individual behaviour, with little room for personal agency or resistance. In contrast, *A Clockwork Orange* delves deeper into the role of power dynamics within Alex's social group. The film presents a more complex interplay between individual agency and social structures, with Alex both shaping and being shaped by the power dynamics within his gang. The narrative explores how these shifts influence his behaviour, particularly in relation to violence and control. Alex's narrative demonstrates how power is dependent on certain conditions and how social standing can serve as both a factor of authority and a potential weakness.

Both characters demonstrate the intricate connection between individual identity, societal systems, and patterns of violence, offering important perspectives on how human behaviour is influenced by the surrounding environment. Such a complex mix of characteristics urges viewers to acknowledge the uneasy truth of how people can play dual roles as both victims and victimisers in society. Several elements related to both the model and the observer play a role in deciding if a behaviour has been acquired through learning. These consist of focus, memory, physical imitation, and drive (Bandura & Walters, 1959). The analysis of these characters highlights the ongoing importance of these theories in comprehending and explaining the subtle elements of human behaviour. Through the analysis of the commonalities between Alex and Baby, it is clear that regardless of their diverse

backgrounds, both individuals are impacted by universal forces that mould human conduct. Through comparing these people, we can learn about how societal, cultural, and personal aspects influence individuals' growth and behaviour, regardless of where they are.

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